

Family planning & women's empowerment

What is family planning?

Family planning refers to supplies and services which enable individuals and couples to attain and plan for their desired number of children, and the spacing and timing of births. Supplies include modern contraceptive methods, such as oral pills, injectables, IUDs, hormone-releasing implants, vaginal barrier methods, and male and female condoms. Services include health care, counselling and information and education related to sexual and reproductive health.

More than 222 million women in developing countries want to avoid pregnancy but are not using modern contraception. In many cases this is because family planning supplies and services are not available or accessible to them.

Family planning services are fundamental to the health and survival of women and children. When women are healthy, it provides benefits to other areas of human development, including poverty reduction, education, population and natural resource sustainability (Box 1).

Family planning is also a tool for social change. It has been shown to empower women and girls in the household, the community, schools, the labour force and the political sphere.

Box 1. Selected benefits of family planning

HEALTH	lower maternal and child morbidity/mortality; fewer unsafe abortions; lower incidence of HIV
EDUCATION	fewer girls/young women drop out of school due to unplanned pregnancies
SUSTAINABILITY	sustainable population growth; countries are better able to adapt to climate change
ECONOMY	women more productive in communities and economies; lower levels of household poverty; contribution to economic growth

Family planning empowers women in the household

Studies have found strong correlations between the increased use of family planning and women's growing decision-making power in the family.

Research also suggests that as access to contraceptives increases, families choose to have fewer children, and daughters become as valued as sons. This is demonstrated, for example, by parents investing more in their daughters' education (see Box 2).

Family planning improves girls' opportunities for education

As more families send their daughters to school, girls have better prospects for training and work throughout their lives. Over time, educated women are more likely to have educated children, particularly daughters. This suggests that **meeting the family planning needs of women and couples today has an impact in the next generation.**

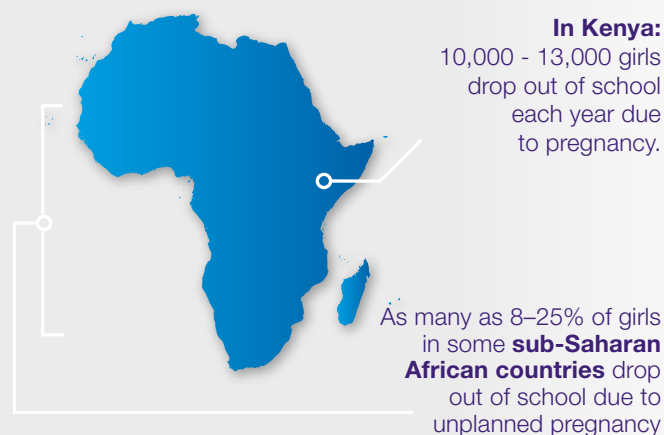
Many girls are forced to abandon their studies due to unplanned pregnancy, and in some countries, girls are immediately expelled if they are found to be pregnant.

Once a girl is in school, if she has access to information and voluntary family planning services, she will also have the ability – and in some cases the choice – to stay in school.

Family planning increases women's participation in the economy and labour market

Women who use contraceptives are more likely to be active in the workforce. This gives them more earning power and the ability to improve their own and their family's economic security. This is in part because family planning enables women to coordinate the timing of their children and size of their families with their need and desire to earn a wage. Ultimately, a woman who can plan her family is better able to plan her life.

Box 2. School drop-out due to unplanned pregnancy (2008)

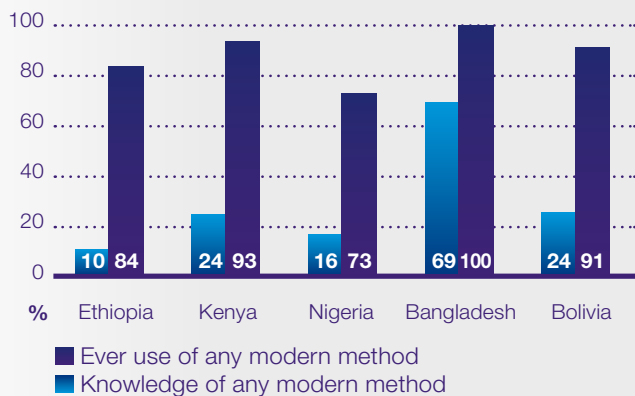


Family planning and empowerment: a route to gender equality

Empowering women and girls – in part through ensuring their access to voluntary family planning – is a crucial step towards more widespread gender equality in communities, societies and states.

Gender inequality has many causes, but it is rooted in socio-cultural norms and myths about what is permissible behaviour for women and men, girls and boys. This includes beliefs related to sexual health and family planning (see also Box 3).

Box 3. Knowledge of modern contraception is high, but young women face barriers accessing supplies and negotiating contraceptive use (2008)



For example, norms related to women being passive and men being assertive or aggressive can lead to men making the decisions about sex in a relationship or marriage. Other norms support the notion that family planning, including contraception, is the sole responsibility of women and girls.

The informed participation of men and boys in reproductive health programmes and decision-making can help to challenge harmful gender norms. It also recognizes that men and boys have reproductive health needs and responsibilities.

“We used to give out condoms, but now we can’t get regular supplies ... one of our community workers said: ‘The young men come to you in the middle of the night, and we don’t have them, and it’s bad news.’ We have to include men in our plans to address unmet need, too!”

– Nana Amma Oforiwa Sam, Advocacy Officer, Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana

WHAT EUROPEAN DONOR GOVERNMENTS CAN DO

- Ensure access to comprehensive family planning services and supplies for women, men and young people. This must include a full range of modern contraceptive methods.
- Ensure comprehensive sexuality and relationship education for all children and adolescents. This should include education about power and negotiation in relationships, and how sexually active boys and men can be equal partners in reproductive health decision-making.
- Change harmful gender and social norms through gender-sensitive health and education programmes.
- Increase the amount and reliability of funding for the promotion of gender equality and family planning including clear gender budget lines in official development assistance (ODA).
- Create an evaluation mechanism with indicators to track the gender impacts of family planning and sex education programmes.
- Make reproductive health programmes and facilities more visible and open to men and boys – for example, by including counselling aimed at boys and men.

Countdown 2015 Europe is a consortium of 16 leading European non-governmental organizations working to address the unmet need for family planning in developing countries. The consortium raises awareness and promotes increased European donor support in terms of policies and funding to ensure universal access to reproductive health and family planning worldwide. For more information, please contact the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN) at: countdown2015europe@ippfen.org or visit www.countdown2015europe.org



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